**Pictures of You**

Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at http://archiveofourown.org/works/15986792.

| | |
|---|---|
| Rating: | Explicit |
| Archive Warning: | Creator Chose Not To Use Archive Warnings |
| Category: | F/F |
| Fandom: | Kill la Kill (Anime & Manga) |
| Relationships: | Kiryuuin Satsuki/Matoi Ryuuko, Gamagoori Ira/Mankanshoku Mako, Jakuzure Nonon/Sanageyama Uzu |
| Characters: | Kiryuuin Satsuki, Matoi Ryuuko, Mankanshoku Mako, Gamagoori Ira, Jakuzure Nonon, Sanageyama Uzu |
| Additional Tags: | high school teachers!au |
| Language: | English |
| Stats: | Published: 2018-09-14 Words: 12,428 Chapters: 1/? |

# Pictures of You

by Redacted_username


Summary

Based on a prompt of "We're both high school teachers and our students ship us. I'm too embarrassed to say anything because I ship us too" or something like that. I honestly forget the actual wording on the prompt because I started this piece over 2 years ago.


Notes

See the end of the work for notes

The morning bell rang as Satsuki Kiryuin stood from her desk at the head of the classroom. The students in her homeroom shuffled mechanically to their seats and quieted to hear the daily announcements as she took attendance. It was the last day before the winter break and even Satsuki herself was feeling as checked out as her students. She wasn't looking forward to the holidays this year, although it was only the past few years that she actually enjoyed them, away from her controlling mother and amongst friends. This year, having moved far across the country to take the current job she had, she would be spending the winter break alone. She reigned her thoughts back to the day ahead of her as the classroom emptied of her homeroom students and slowly began to fill with her first real class.

"Being the last class before the break, we're not going to start the new structure until we return. However, due to the complex nature making it difficult to work with, it would not hurt to familiarize yourself with sestinas and maybe read a few over the break. Today, I want you to pick any style and write about winter. It does not have to be specific, but it does have to be completed in the next 30 minutes." There was a great rustling amongst the students as they put away their binders and produced the marble composition books used for in class assignments. Once the students began their exercise, only the soft scraping of pens on paper filled the room. Satsuki took the time to lose herself in her own writing, after all, a creative writing teacher should be able to come up with something interesting in 30 minutes but her train of thought was sharply interrupted.

"Mrs. Kiryuin?" Satsuki did her best to keep from cringing at the title.

"Please Mr. Clark, it's *Miss* Kiryuin; stop marrying me off. How may I be of assistance?" The shy boy muttered an apology for the millionth time the semester.

"Does it have to be winter the season? Like, snow and cold and shit?" Satsuki smiled softly, grateful that at least one student that morning would not be driveling on in a halfway eloquent manner about winter wonderlands.

"It does not have to be specific," she repeated and he nodded before returning to his work. As she had predicted, after the 30 minutes were up, the last 20 minutes of class were spent listening to multiple pieces about the beauty of snow and the chill in the air and the magical frost on the windows. Unfortunately, Satsuki would have to read whatever Mr. Clark had written later, the bell rang before his turn to share. Her students handed in their work as they left and instead of heading to the teachers lounge, Satsuki decided to mark the assignments now to save herself at least one class load later.

Satsuki had completely lost track of time and was pulled, rather unceremoniously, from what she had been writing by her next class entering the room. It was not long after the class had began their exercise that there was another interruption. Satsuki didn't know her fellow teachers very well, she was reluctant to make new friends, but she knew who Ryuko Matoi was. The energetic photography teacher was difficult to miss, with a bright red streak in her hair and a habit of interrupting Satsuki's classes on a weekly basis. Satsuki looked up from

her desk as two of her students began whispering excitedly, one of them sliding a crisp five dollar bill across the other's desk as Ryuko strode up to Satsuki's desk.

"Hey, how's your last day?" Ryuko whispered in greeting.

"Fine," Satsuki answered shortly but politely, also in a soft whisper.

"Good. So, you comin' to the party tonight? The whole department is invited." Truthfully, Satsuki had no interest in attending the creative arts department's winter holiday party. She had received the invitation via e-mail and deleted it without even opening to read any further.

"I wasn't planning on it," Satsuki whispered, growing impatient at this point. The fevered whispering resumed between the two students.

"Oi! Severin! Malek! Eyes on your own paper!" Ryuko scolded as a faint scarlet crept across her face.

"It's not a test," Satsuki had the feeling that she was missing something and she seemed to be the only one.

"Oh. Well why are we whispering? Anyway, you should come so I can- I mean, we can all get to know you a little." Ryuko sheepishly backpedaled. "Cause you keep to yourself a lot, ya know? I mean, we have a lot of the same students." She raised her voice slightly and threw a pointed glare at the two whispering students. "We could gossip about them."

"Ms. Matoi, is there something I can help you with at this moment?" Satsuki asked, hoping to get Ryuko out of her class and return to her idle writing.

"Oh, uhhhh, I ran outta tape. Got any I can steal?" Without verbally answering, Satsuki pulled open the desk drawer in front of Ryuko revealing a roll of tape. "Thanks…and ummm, you really should come tonight." Ryuko stood, turning the plastic dispenser in her hands, waiting for an answer.

Satsuki sighed, "Perhaps," but smiled softly as the other teacher’s face lit up.

"Alright! I'll save you some champagne!" The two students who had been whispering started giggling amongst themselves as Ryuko left the room. Satsuki stared at them until they saw her and somberly returned to their assignment.

The rest of the day wore on and Satsuki found herself watching the clock just as intently as her students for the final twenty minutes of the day. When the bell rang, Satsuki was first out the door and made it all the way to her car before being stopped again.

"Hey! Satsuki! Wait up!" Ryuko was panting as she jogged to catch up, breath billowing out clouds in the cold winter air. Satsuki watched Ryuko compose herself before speaking, suddenly thinking of many ways to write about winter in thirty minutes as the clouds of breath faded into the gray afternoon sky. "I didn't mean to putchya on the spot like that in the

middle of class." It took Satsuki a moment to realize what Ryuko was talking about as she pulled her thoughts back to the present conversation.

"It's fine," Satsuki answered shortly again, taken aback at the sudden interaction outside of the classroom environment.

Ryuko nervously adjusted the strap of her camera bag on her shoulder. "So, are you always this quiet?" She gave a nervous chuckle and Satsuki sighed again. "Sorry. Well, I just wanted to apologize and tell you to have a nice break if you don't go to the party."

"Thank you. You have a pleasant break as well." Satsuki smiled again before turning to open her car door. Ryuko flung an end of her bright red scarf behind her as she walked away and Satsuki watched her leave, the sudden inexplicable spark of inspiration returning.

Satsuki dropped her bag at the door as soon as she entered her apartment. Her original plan was to finish marking the day's assignments to get it out of the way, but instead she grabbed a marble composition notebook. Everything in the apartment was neatly kept except for a random assortment of notebooks that lay about the space. She reflexively turned on the stove to heat the water filled kettle that permanently rested on the back burner as she began to write. She wrote of red roses on snow covered graves. Of silver white full moons giving way to red dawns. The kettle began to scream as she wrote of red scarves and she dropped her pen unceremoniously.

Abandoning the notebook, she sat in the old worn recliner, cradling the hot mug of tea in her hands as she waited for her laptop to boot up. She stared at the screen for a while before setting down the mug and opening a blank document, transposing everything she had just handwritten. Re-reading it over and over again, waiting for more to surface, she stared at the blinking cursor and sighed. *Perhaps another time,* she thought to herself saving the document to her file of unfinished work and pulling up the piece she had been working on for months. In spite of it only being a short story, it was taking her a painfully long time to write it. Once again she found herself staring at the screen for a long time without a single thought crossing her mind until: *I guess it's true. Those who can't do, teach.* Satsuki stretched and closed her laptop, too frustrated to stare at the screen any longer. Looking over at her school bag, she still didn't feel like grading those assignments; listening to the ones that were read in class was enough for one day. The sky had grown dark but it was still early in the evening, and against all of her intentions, she found herself getting changed to attend the winter break party.

Roaring laughter and Christmas carols met Satsuki's ears as the door to the extravagant house opened. The short, overly excited head of the theater department bounced excitedly as she ushered Satsuki inside, eagerly taking her coat.

"Oh my gosh! I didn't expect to see you here at all! How wonderful! Come in, come in, say hello to everyone!" Mako Mankanshoku was bouncing through the house as she practically shoved Satsuki into the large sitting room. Satsuki willed herself to smile awkwardly as she scanned the room, a bright flash and Mako's loud gasp train wrecking her attempt to match names to a few faces. "Ryuko! You know my other side is my best side!" Mako suddenly appeared on the other side of Satsuki and locked arms with her. Satsuki did not have time to re-arrange the slightly shocked expression on her face before another flash left black splotches in the middle of her vision.

Ryuko was laughing as she approached Satsuki. "Photographic evidence you were here," and Ryuko nudged Satsuki lightly. "I should submit that one to the yearbook!"

"Please delete that immediately." Satsuki was entirely serious but was surprised at the almost playful tone with which she spoke.

"Hell no! That's probably the best shot I've gotten so far. Besides, I couldn't even if I wanted to. Etched into film forever," Ryuko laughed as she cranked the lever to advance the film in her camera. "Well, for a while anyway."

"Film?" Satsuki was surveying the machine in Ryuko's hands with great interest.

"Yeah. Ya know," Ryuko dug a small canister out of her pocket and held it up. "Film."

Satsuki exhaled softly through her nose and smiled as she took the film. "I know what film is. I'm just surprised you're not using digital. Is this," she squinted slightly, reading the writing on the casing, "black and white?" Ryuko shrugged.

"Mako will take plenty of pictures with her phone, mostly of herself, but yeah, call me old fashioned. I love working in black and white. So simple, but so many ways to manipulate light and shadow. Plus it gives me an excuse to spend a few afternoons in the dark room after classes." Sure enough, Mako was buzzing around the room snapping selfies with everybody.

"I didn't even know we had a dark room," Satsuki mused, rolling the metal canister between her fingers before returning it to Ryuko who snorted.

"Where did you think we developed and printed our photos?" Satsuki shrugged in response. "Oh man! You'll have to come see it." Ryuko grinned from ear to ear at the prospect and something about her excitement made Satsuki relax. She followed Ryuko around the party as she snapped candid pictures and explained the finer points of photography. Aperture size and shutter speed, depth of field and contrast. Satsuki was amazed at how intricate photography actually was when examining these finer points. The hour grew late, and Mako had clearly had too much champagne, but insisted that they set the timer on her phone's camera to get a group shot because "Ryuko needs to be in the picture and her camera only takes boring black and white pictures". Satsuki tried her best to stay as close to the edge of the group as possible, but Ryuko yanked her dead center between her and Mako as she grumbled about her camera having a timer and automatic features too.

While everyone was still roughly huddled together, Satsuki took the opportunity to quietly say her farewells and left. It must have started snowing shortly after she had arrived, a fine

dusting of white coated her car and she was stopped, for the second time that day, before getting in. Ryuko was running out of the house towards her, calling her name again.

"You have a habit of sneaking away," she said between breaths. "I might have to put a bell on you." She was smiling that ear to ear grin again.

"And you have a habit of interrupting me everywhere I go," Satsuki retorted, a little more harshly than she had intended. Ryuko's grin fell into a look of hurt disappointment before Satsuki added, "I might have to put a bell on *you* ." She smiled softly as Ryuko's spirit flared back to life and quickly snapped a picture of Satsuki.

"Now *that* is going to be the best shot I've gotten all night," and she laughed again. Satsuki normally would have began to argue, but there was something about Ryuko laughing in the falling snow that filled her with a sense of warm affection. "Anyway, I gotta get back in there. Mako will kill me if I miss the secret santa," Ryuko ran a hand through her hair and became incredibly attentive to changing the settings on her camera. "Ummm, so I'll see you after break. Have a good one," and she turned to leave.

"Ryuko…thanks for keeping me company. I had a good time. Have a nice break." All Satsuki got was another wide grin before Mako burst through the front door and started shouting for Ryuko to come back inside.

***

"Satsuki, it's been almost half a year, and you haven't made even one new friend."

Satsuki sighed into the phone as the barista placed her large tea on the counter. Her oldest and best friend, Nonon Jakuzure, had been urging her to make new friends all year so far.

"Just because you make new friends doesn't mean your old ones disappear." She added, hoping Satsuki would do more than just sigh.

"I know. How much longer are you going to beat this dead horse?" Satsuki was growing tired of the subject coming up every time she spoke to Nonon.

"Until you stop playing Harper Lee on everyone over there. Need I remind you that she didn't become a recluse until *after* she wrote To Kill A Mockingbird?"

"I'm not playing Harper Lee and I am not a recluse. I went to the department holiday party two days ago." Satsuki nearly dropped her scalding hot tea all over herself at Nonon's loud gasp as she settled into a comfortable chair in a secluded corner of the coffee shop.

"Who is it? You don't go to parties for funsies." Nonon’s tone was dripping with scandal and accusation.

"Don't be ridiculous. Someone took the time to personally invite me. I may not be interested in making friends but I certainly don't want to be rude." Satsuki responded, not aware that there was someone eavesdropping nearby.

"Not interested in makin' friends huh?" Ryuko Matoi slid into the squishy chair opposite of Satsuki.

"WHO THE HELL IS THAT?!" Nonon was shouting into the phone as Satsuki quickly murmured that she'd call back later before hanging up.

"So you're probably not interested in the interdepartmental gossip." Ryuko waggled her eyebrows and jabbed her thumb in the direction of Mako, who was holding hands with an incredibly large man Satsuki had only ever seen during full school assemblies.

"I didn't mean, I just-" Satsuki was searching for something to say to smooth things over. Not that Ryuko seemed upset in any way. Making matters worse, she could feel her cheeks coloring as Ryuko laughed.

"Nah, it's all good. I get it. New school, new teachers, new gremlins running around giggling and stealing your supplies so you have to go ask the mysterious introverted creative writing teacher babe for more tape. Plus a new town and-"

"You think I'm introverted?" Satsuki asked cooly and entertained, for a brief moment, the possibility that Ryuko was in league with Nonon.

" *That's* what you got from that? That I think you're introverted, not that I called you a babe?"

"You think I'm a 'babe'?" The word felt strange as it fell awkwardly, not part of her usual verbal repertoire and her eyebrow quirked, punctuating the delivery of the question. Ryuko seemed to be having a difficult time interpreting all of this.

"Ahhh, sorry. Mako told me not to even come over here, let alone say anything. That I'd probably scare you away because sometimes I come on too strong to people that aren't even-"

"I am interested," Satsuki stated rather quickly cutting Ryuko off from her rambling again. The dumbstruck look on Ryuko's face prompted Satsuki to elaborate. "In making friends, I mean. Just not until I know I'll be staying."

"Oh. Of course," and Ryuko chuckled. A sort of uneasy little sound that made Satsuki want to throw her a life preserver for the deep water that she had so recklessly dove into.

"But there's this one teacher that keeps interrupting my classes and following me to my car. At first it was slightly annoying but her persistence is endearing and all of a sudden I find myself rather curious about photography." Satsuki wasn't sure where it came from, but for how foreign it was to her, the sly smirk came easily.

"You can always pop into the photo lab after school. I still have to develop and print all the shots I took at the party." Ryuko was grinning again now as Mako made her way over to them.

" *That's* what you got from that? That I'm curious about-"

"Oh ho, no. I got *way* more than that," Ryuko cut her off before Mako got close enough to hear their conversation and flashed a sly grin of her own. "I'll let you get back to grading all those poems. See ya!" Ryuko successfully headed off Mako before she made it to Satsuki and managed to get her to leave. Satsuki watched as the three of them walked down the sidewalk and out of view before calling Nonon back.

"There's definitely someone. Who is it?" Nonon didn't even bother to say hello when she answered Satsuki's return call.

"The photo teacher," Satsuki responded with a soft smile.

***

Satsuki wasn't at all surprised when Ryuko made an appearance halfway through her first class after lunch. From what she had learned from Ryuko over the break, the giggles that came from the same two students as before were not surprising either.

"Now that you have some background and the format, use the rest of the class to choose your six words and begin writing the sestina. Remember that it can be deceptively complicated so take your time and choose your words carefully." As she spoke, she made her way to the desk and pulled out a roll of tape.

"It's staples this time. It would appear *somebody,* " she paused and glared at the giggling girl and boy, "decided potato chips work better than staples." Satsuki had just then noticed the stapler in Ryuko's hands. She opened the desk drawer again and pulled out a box of staples as Ryuko opened the stapler. Indeed there were potato chips, smashed to pieces, stuffed along the empty track of the device. Ryuko shook the offending crumbs into the trashcan and held the stapler as Satsuki refilled it with it's intended contents. The mischievous grin that flashed across Ryuko's face temporarily distracting Satsuki long enough for the stapler to be shut dangerously close to Satsuki's fingers.

"Excuse me. I need those." The comment, although entirely innocent except for the slightly playful tone, brought about renewed giggles from the students and a jaw drop from Ryuko. "For writing and typing," Satsuki quickly added. Ryuko had to clear her throat before regaining her composure.

"Right, well, thanks Sat- Ms. Kiryuin. You'll come by after school for that book then?" Satsuki had no idea what she was talking about but nodded curtly before Ryuko turned and exited the classroom.

To Satsuki's horror, Ryuko was nowhere to be found when she entered the classroom of the photo lab. Only the same giggling students from her class were lingering and whispering in the back of the room. All three of them jumped about a foot when the door next to the two students swung open and Ryuko strode purposefully to her desk.

"Pay up, Severin. Of course there's a book. Now get outta here, you'll miss your busses." They scampered out of the classroom as Satsuki raised an eyebrow. "She bet him five bucks there was no book I wanted to give you."

" *Is* there a book you want to give me?" Satsuki asked already knowing the answer.

"Of course not, just throwing them off the trail. Do you know the rumors that would fly if they knew we spent the afternoon in the darkroom together?" Satsuki was now genuinely confused. Ryuko produced three canisters of film from her camera bag and placed them on the table. "You weren't really curious about photography were you?"

"No. I mean, yes, I am. I was just confused. Rumors?" Ryuko let out another nervous chuckle, but this one wasn't the same uneasy defeated chuckle as the one in the coffee shop. This was the sound of someone who had been caught harboring a secret.

"It's stupid, just kids. They have overactive imaginations. Ok, so, what do you know about developing film?" Ryuko grabbed one of the canisters and tossed it to Satsuki, effectively dodging the questions and changing the subject.

"That you take it to the local 24-hour place and they do it for you," she smiled and threw the canister back to Ryuko, "and that you're going to teach me how to do it."

"Alrighty then. I can teach you everything, but for now, I'll keep it to film development. So you load the film into the camera and when you press the shutter, the aperture opens, letting light into the camera. That light hits the film and the light sensitive materials on the film record the image. As such, until the film is secured in the tank, it has to be kept in total darkness. What we'll do today, is get the film out of this canister, into the tank, and process it. Tomorrow we'll go into, what you know as, a proper darkroom and print some shots."

Ryuko grabbed some supplies and returned to the desk. "This part can be tricky, so it's good to practice before you go in. Here," she handed Satsuki a worn looking canister of film and an odd tong looking device. "Rest the film in the grooves at the tip of these then pinch the ends to pop the film open." Satsuki did as she was instructed and as soon as she put pressure on either end of the canister, the top popped off. She jumped in surprise and Ryuko laughed. "It's gonna be a little harder with the real thing. These are the practice ones. They've been opened a million times. Now, pull it out but do your best to not touch the film as much as possible." Once again Satsuki jumped when the clear practice film burst from its small space and unfurled. "It's ok, just cut the film off." Next Ryuko handed her an odd spool device.

"Let me guess," she threaded the film into the beginning of the spool and began manually pulling the film along the edges.

"Ah-ah. Wait. It'll do the work for you. Watch, hold the edges with your fingertips." Ryuko reached out and placed her hands over Satsuki's. Both of them paused and looked at each

other before Ryuko moved each of Satsuki's hands in opposite directions, cranking the device, before quickly moving them back the other way. "Watch!" Ryuko had to remind Satsuki to look down and sure enough, the film threaded itself onto the spool as she turned the device. "After that, you pop it in the tank, seal it up, and you're good to go! Think you can do it?"

Satsuki was seriously doubting whether she would be able to do it after one practice run and threw a skeptical look at Ryuko. "I'm supposed to do all of this in total darkness?"

"You'll do fine. It's just daunting 'cause it'll be pitch black. You'll have me in there if you get stuck. I make the students do it on their own." Ryuko smirked as she grabbed the three canisters they would be processing for real and headed to the door she had emerged from earlier.

It really was pitch black. Satsuki was hoping Ryuko had been exaggerating about that earlier. Even the cracks between the door and the wall were covered. Satsuki nervously sat next to Ryuko and reached out for the tools she had just recently learned about. From the sound of it, Ryuko had already opened her canister and was loading the film onto the spool. Satsuki's palms were slightly sweaty, causing the canister to slip from her grip as she attempted to fit it into the grooves on the tongs. Luckily, she caught it before it fell.

"You ok over there?" Ryuko asked as she dropped the first spool into the tank.

"I can't get the top off." Satsuki had managed to get the canister into the tongs, but just as Ryuko had warned her, the top was stubbornly staying put.

"Here, let me help," but before Satsuki could hold out the film in her direction, she felt Ryuko straddle her and settle into her lap. Satsuki was incredibly grateful that the room was pitch black because she was sure her face was the deepest shade of crimson it had ever been in her entire life. Ryuko placed her hands over Satsuki's again, "go ahead." Satsuki slowly applied pressure to the tongs. "Don't be gentle with it. Put more pressure on the canister," Ryuko pressed down on Satsuki's film holding hand and sure enough, when Satsuki tried again, the top gave way. "Good, next." Satsuki cut the film free and felt around for the spool. She could have sworn it was right in front of her for her to grab with her left hand. "Lost your way?" Satsuki could hear the grin through the teasing tone as she leaned forward to grope around the table for the device. Her nose brushed ever so lightly against what she came to understand was the skin of Ryuko's neck. They both froze for a moment before Satsuki remembered to breathe, inhaling the warm scent of Ryuko, exhaling a hot breath. She felt Ryuko shiver at the same time that she found the spool and recoiled quickly.

"I think," she had to pause to catch her breath, "I think I can do the rest."

"Right. Do you want to do the last one?" Ryuko got up out of Satsuki's lap and back into her own chair. She sounded just as flustered.

"You can do it. I'll try again next time, after more practice in the light." Satsuki let out a long exhale as she dropped her spool into the tank. Ryuko didn't take much longer with the last roll and closed the tank tight. Satsuki tried her best to pay attention as Ryuko explained the various chemicals she was pouring into the tank, but she was incredibly distracted by the curve of Ryuko's neck that she had so recently come intimately close to.

***

Satsuki never wrote about romance, love, or romantic passion. It was not something she was familiar with. Nonon had asked her during their time in college together to write love letters for her, but Satsuki always refused. Nonon would argue that just because she's never felt it, doesn't mean she couldn't make something up that sounded good. Satsuki would argue back that she refused to write so superficially and that if she tried, it would be substandard in every way to every piece Nonon had ever read of hers. Then there was the final time Nonon asked, and she dropped a bomb on Satsuki.

"Just write it about that chick in our classic lit class you stare at the whole time and I'll just change the pronouns." Satsuki had looked up from her homework and stared, jaw slightly unhinged. "What? It's fine. I don't have any issue."

"No." Her tone was cold and final, partly to compensate for the fact that Nonon had finally shaken her into dropping her calculated facade.

"Come on Satsuki. Just one tiny little poem," Nonon was actually begging this time.

"The pronouns are not the issue. I've told you a thousand times why I will not." Satsuki was actually annoyed this time.

"How did you make it twenty one years and not have a single crush?"

"I've had crushes...as you so bluntly pointed out. I've just never been in love or anything of the sort. Most certainly not the infatuate lust you fall into for every shaggy haired jock to flash a cocky smile in your direction. I have more important things to focus on than romance." The dark reminder that Satsuki was working towards a career to get away from her mother was enough to stop Nonon's arguing and she never asked again.

Here she was, years later, sitting in a mostly dark apartment, a cold cup of tea and a blank notebook page mocking her through the dim lamp light. It was hardly the first time someone had piqued her interest, but definitely the first time it had been so thoroughly piqued. In spite of what Nonon thought, Satsuki was not completely devoid of any sexual or romantic impulse. She just wasn't prone to fall head over heels for someone she barely knew. Which was why it was so unfamiliar that every time she closed her eyes she imagined what it would have been like if she had pressed her lips to Ryuko's neck in the darkness that afternoon. She

wrenched her eyes open and sighed, getting up from her chair and throwing the notebook in the newly vacated space. She took her mug into the kitchen and resigned to go to bed for the night. Reaching to turn off the lamp by her chair, the open notebook caught her eye. It was the same notebook she had scrawled a few lines in the day winter break had started. Red scarves blowing in the wind was the last line and Satsuki wondered just how long she had been subconsciously thinking about Ryuko. She fell asleep thinking of red lips on white skin, of red streaks in black hair.

***

Halfway through her lunch period, Satsuki's phone vibrated in her pocket. It was Nonon, responding to Satsuki's account of the previous day.

>Please tell me you did something in the darkroom.<

Satsuki shook her head as she responded they would be in the darkroom this afternoon.

>BANG HER IN THE DARKROOM!!!<

Satsuki didn't bother responding, she knew a barrage of messages were on the way.

>Just kidding.<

>I know you won't.<

>but you should.<

>at least do something.<

>anything.<

>I’m sorry. I’m just excited for you.<

Satsuki sighed, cleaning up her space and reviewing what she would be teaching. She already knew the lesson forwards and backwards, the review was more of an attempt to distract herself than a necessity. She had been thinking about this afternoon from the moment she woke up and Nonon pressing the more intimate possibilities added a measure of anxiety to the excitement. What ultimately caught Satsuki off guard when she realized the last class of the day had began, was the fact that Ryuko had not interrupted at all that day. Checking her phone as she packed up her materials, she found another ten messages from Nonon, all of them were incredibly lewd and made her visibly blush at the ideas.

Ryuko was cutting the film they had processed the day before into smaller strips and inserting them into sheets of plastic sleeves when Satsuki entered the photo classroom, a magnificent

grin plastered on Ryuko's face at the sight of her. Satsuki let out a deep breath as she approached the desk.

"Everything alright?" Ryuko asked.

"Yes. Just a long day of intricate form poetry."

"You'll have to teach me some of it sometime, ya know? Quid pro quo." Ryuko chuckled as she slid the last of the strips into its holder and slid the sheet to Satsuki.

"Definitely another time. If I have to talk about sestinas one more time today I'm dropping the unit from the lesson plan." She noticed the confused look on Ryuko's face as she held the negatives up to the light.

"Whats?" Ryuko asked.

"Sestinas," Satsuki repeated, hoping beyond reason that simply repeating the word would make Ryuko understand. She took a deep breath and blurted, "it's a thirty-nine line poem with the same six words repeated in a different order at the end of each line throughout it's six stanzas concluding with an envoi containing all six words over two final lines." Satsuki knew this was just as foolish as simply repeating the word and indeed, this statement left Ryuko blinking in even more confusion.

"Gesundheit." Ryuko laughed as she stood and Satsuki was incredibly thankful that she didn't continue to press for more explanation. "Someday I'm sure that will make sense to me. Anyway, today we'll be printing in the darkroom, bring those," she pointed to the rest of the sheets of negatives before making her way to another door off the side of the classroom.

Satsuki followed Ryuko into what was a small receiving area. The tiny room was lit by dim red lights, and it wasn't until the door Satsuki entered through was completely closed that Ryuko opened another door to their right. It took a minute for Satsuki's eyes to adjust to the even more dimly red lit, larger room they entered. Her breath silently hitched when Ryuko took her free hand to lead her to a workspace. Now that her eyes were adjusted to the lighting, Satsuki began to take in her surroundings while Ryuko gathered supplies. All along the walls of the room were individual divided workspaces with a projection machines. In the middle of the room was a long, deep, workbench area with what she guessed was a ventilation hood along the length of it. Ryuko was gathering supplies from the island countertop space they had walked passed on the way in, pulling paper from black boxes and cutting them to size on a cutter.

"What is this thing?" Satsuki asked as Ryuko joined her again.

"This," Ryuko began as she placed a metal device under the machine, "is an enlarger. It shines light from the top, through the negative we'll place into it, and, well, enlarges the image." She pulled another metal device from the machine and peaked through the rectangular hole cut in the middle of it.

"The negatives go in there right?" Satsuki held up one of the sheets she had brought in with her and Ryuko nodded. Finding the image she wanted, Ryuko pulled a strip of negatives from the sheet, fitted it into the holder, and continued her tutorial. Satsuki tried her best to concentrate as Ryuko explained the other bits and pieces of the machine. She explained that the thin square of plastic she placed into the machine was a filter, but for the life of her Satsuki couldn't have told anyone what it actually did. There was no real pressure, but Nonon texting her all afternoon was enough for Satsuki to have created her own anxiety, and anxiety and uncertainty were something Satsuki didn't deal with well. She had spent her life living her mother's ambitions, then carefully crafting and executing her plan to move as far away from her mother as possible. It was only now that she had achieved her goal that such uncertainties began cropping up and that brought anxiety along with it. It was somewhat difficult to keep the cool, well composed demeanor she usually wore so well around Ryuko, who was explaining how to do important things again. All Satsuki could really concentrate on was Ryuko, fascinated by watching her work so fluidly in her element. It was beautiful really, poetry in motion.

"So set the timer to three seconds and pull the cardboard back each time you hit the light." All of a sudden Ryuko was holding a piece of cardboard out and Satsuki took it slowly.

"Wait, what am I doing?" Satsuki blinked for a moment, attempting to clear her head of thoughts she was not used to having float through her mind, thoughts that she blamed Nonon for. "What if I mess it up?"

"It's just a test strip, don't worry. Here, I'll guide you." Ryuko placed her hand over Satsuki's cardboard holding one, gently placing it onto the raised edge of the paper easel. Satsuki pressed the timer, and each time the light clicked off again, Ryuko guided her hand to move the cardboard. The whole process didn't last that long, maybe half a minute, but Satsuki's hand was tingling where Ryuko's made contact and her heartbeat was pounding in her ears. New territory and uncertainty indeed.

"Alright, now take it over to the chemicals and follow the directions. I'll be right over." Ryuko began searching through the negatives again as Satsuki gently picked up the strip of photo paper. There were numbers and directions taped to the side of the ventilation hood where each pan of chemicals sat. She slid the strip into the pan under a big [1 DEVELOPER 30-60 seconds, agitate gently]. Not sure exactly what "agitate gently" meant, she picked up the edge of the pan and rocked it back and forth. She was so preoccupied with counting the proper length of time in her head that she jumped when Ryuko appeared on the other side of the developing station gently slipping her own test strip into the solution. Satsuki was fascinated with how the image sprang to life on previously blank paper. She hadn't paid much attention to what image her strip contained and groaned when she noticed Mako Mankanshoku's grinning face and her own slightly dazed expression looking back at her.

"You couldn't have picked a different one?" Ryuko was snickering as she grabbed two sets of tongs and handed one to Satsuki. She carefully retrieved her test strip and slid it smoothly into the pan marked [2 STOP BATH 30 seconds, agitate gently]. She repeated the same slight rocking of the pan. Thankfully, she had noticed the clock on the wall and could keep time from that instead of counting in her head.

"See! You're a natural! I'll have these done in no time with you helping." Ryuko moved to the stop bath as Satsuki placed hers in the the next pan, [3 FIXER 30 seconds]. Satsuki could see the appeal to this whole process, it had a zen like quality to it. The chemicals softly flowing over the paper, the cool dimly lit room. She could easily see herself spending afternoons in the darkroom. She placed the strip in the final container. This wasn't a rectangular pan containing chemicals like the previous three, but a fairly deep, round container over a faucet. A hose ran from the faucet into the container and the drain in the bottom was sitting directly over the drain in the basin of the workstation, ensuring a constant gentle flow of water. The sign above read [4 WASH 2 minutes]. Ryuko dunked her strip, rather unceremoniously, and swished it around a bit before pulling it out.

"Grab yours. It's just a test strip, you don't need to wash for two minutes," she added at the quizzical look on Satsuki's face. "Let's go take a look," and with Satsuki following, they exited back into the classroom.

Satsuki's eyes took a moment to adjust, and after a few blinks, she looked at the strip in her hand. There were five distinct sections on the paper, each darker than the other. The first one was clearly too light, the second and third looked much better, and the last two seemed too dark. Appraising the second and third sections again, she made her decision.

"The third one looks best," she announced to Ryuko, who already had a wide grin on her face. "What? Is that not correct?"

"No, no. It's spot on. I'm just impressed. Most people would have gone with six seconds, but the black isn't rich enough and you'd lose that excellent contrast. Especially riiiiight here," and she pointed to Satsuki's eyebrows in the picture. Satsuki frowned slightly and Ryuko laughed. "Has anyone ever told you you're adorable when you pout like that?" They both turned bright red before Ryuko broke the silence again. "Ok, so let's go print these."

"Wait, what's yours?" Satsuki asked as Ryuko disappeared through the door to the darkroom.

They were back at the enlargers again. Ryuko handed Satsuki a 4 x 5 piece of photo paper that fit into the holder and explained that all Satsuki had to do was set the timer for nine seconds and then develop like the test strips. Satsuki was placing her picture into the wash when Ryuko appeared next to her, sliding her own into the developer. It was the last picture of Satsuki that Ryuko had taken. Even in the dim red light, Satsuki could see the look on Ryuko's face as she worked. Focused and yet, so careful with the picture. As if it was something delicate, something precious. As if it was the most beautiful thing she had ever seen. Satsuki hadn't realized there were tears in her eyes until Ryuko's smile switched immediately to concern as she placed the print into the fixer.

"Shit! I'm sorry. I can print a different one. I…" Ryuko was fumbling for words as Satsuki shook her head, trying to compose herself.

"It's fine. It's just…no one's ever looked at me like that before." Satsuki was trying to count the holes in a drain cover on the floor, anything to stop the world from spinning.

"Are you for real?! How could anyone not? I mean…" Ryuko had taken a step towards her and gently nudged Satsuki's chin up. "You're beautiful." It was almost whispered, said with such reverence, and when they finally locked eyes, the world settled itself. Quickly as everything had settled, it was completely blown away when Ryuko captured Satsuki's lips with her own. Satsuki melted into the kiss and she found herself wrapping her arms around Ryuko's neck as things began to heat up. White hot electricity shot through Satsuki's veins when a soft hand settled under her shirt, just at the button of her pants, and suddenly she was up against the ledge of the closest enlarger station.

"Mmmmmph. Wait. Ryuko," she managed between kisses and Ryuko paused. "Your picture is still in the fixer." Ryuko waved her hand before stealing another kiss and beginning to work again at the button of Satsuki's pants. Satsuki was on fire, but the uneasy churning in the pit of her stomach jolted her into action. She grabbed both of Ryuko's hands before they could manage any further, lacing their fingers together and pulling Ryuko's arms around her waist. Satsuki managed to muster enough willpower to stop kissing Ryuko for a moment, resting her forehead against the other woman's to catch her breath.

"It's fine, really. It's just fixer," Ryuko reassured as she leaned forward for another kiss, but Satsuki stopped her.

"It's not the picture. I…I've never done this." Satsuki didn't want to have to admit it. She had hoped that the fixer comment would have thrown the breaks just a little. Ryuko just blinked for a moment before comprehension dawned on her. "I'm sorry. I really do like you. I just," Satsuki laughed nervously as Ryuko's expression softened. "I'm a creative writing teacher yet words are failing me."

"You want to do it with me but not here like this," Ryuko supplied.

Satsuki kissed her once more before releasing her grip on Ryuko's hands. "Exactly."

"No need to apologize. I'd rather you have told me than have kept going." Ryuko's smile was brilliant even in the dim light. She returned to the developing station and moved the picture to the wash. "So we'll take it slow. If that's what you want, I mean." Satsuki nodded. "Great. So are you free tomorrow?"

"Depends on what you have in mind."

"The school band is playing at the winter fair and, well, I have to go as official photographer; but I've got the rest of the night free to do whatever and it'd be nice to have some company, for myself, ya know." Ryuko, in spite of all her boldness and bravado, was irresistibly endearing as she less than gracefully asked Satsuki out. "I mean, Mako is bringing Ira so I'd be stuck third wheeling it, cause no one wants to go to the fair alone. Er, that sounds bad." Satsuki was actually giggling as Ryuko swore under her breath. "Ok, hold on. Let me start over."

"And here I thought you were quite proficient in these matters," Satsuki teased. Now that the world had righted itself and cooled to a more habitable temperature, Satsuki was able to keep a better hold on herself. *Truth really does set one free, how cliché* , Satsuki mused to herself as she watched Ryuko regain her own composure.

"Hey, I can't be great at everything. Anyway, wanna go to the fair with me tomorrow?"

"Only if it's a date," Satsuki replied and Ryuko's entire energy shifted. The way she shuffled her feet betraying her own anxiety, a suit far less fitting than the slightly overconfident swagger she usually wore.

"Yeah. Heh. A date it is!" She broke out in a fantastic grin, her recovery was akin to cats landing on their feet. Satsuki once again spent her drive home constructing stanzas of dim lights and soft lips and red streaked rebels falling out of trees. A small smile playing across her face as she snorted at the absurdity.

***

Satsuki spent her Saturday morning the way she usually did, curled up in her chair with a cup of tea and a notebook. She didn't even skip a beat when her phone rings on the arm of her chair.

"Sleeping in I see." She answered, already knowing exactly who was on the other end without really looking.

"It *is* Saturday. You should try it sometime," Nonon snapped back playfully at the jibe. The rustling sounds of pillows and sheets confirms.

"The early bird gets the worm," Satsuki quipped back.

"Well someone's awfully chipper. Was it amazing? Fireworks and waves of pleasure and all that cliché nonsense?"

*Hmmm, clichés weren't all nonsense.* "No. We are going on a date tonight."

“I didn't call to hear about your plans. Come on, spill it.” Nonon may have been an entire country away, but Satsuki could still hear her eyebrows waggling.

“I shall not kiss and tell. There, you wanted cliché.”

“You definitely just did. Was it good? That’s it? Just kissing?” Nonon asked, a hint of disappointment in her voice.

“Things may have gotten a bit heated but-”

“You threw the breaks!?” Nonon interrupted.

Speaking of throwing breaks, this train of conversation needed a shortstop of its own. “There will be times and places, many if I am to take your advice, for such encounters. However, I would prefer that *my* first time not be so...unceremonious.”

“God, you make me sound like a whore. What do you want, a bed of rose petals?” Nonon snorted.

“Precisely, and silk sheets and a choir of angels will sing and every other ridiculous so called cliché thing you can think of,” Satsuki exaggerated.

“Really?”

Satsuki actually cringed as she stood and stretched from her chair. “Of course not, but perhaps a bit more of a connection besides physical attraction is not so much to ask.”

“I’m just making sure you don't die a lonely old cat lady,” Nonon muttered, clearly now just as finished with this particular topic as Satsuki was.

“That’s preposterous. You know I despise cats. Anyway, how was karaoke? I assume that would be the reason you slept until...nearly noon?” Satsuki checked her watch as she set her teacup into the sink.

“Ugh. Uzu beat me again, but only because all the girls love him. He’s such a ham on stage, big lug. I can't take him anywhere."

"He's showing off for you, Nonon. It's quite touching really," Satsuki mused as she began half heartedly skimming her closet for something to wear.

"I know, I know. I should still have the upper hand." Nonon was the band director at the school Satsuki had began teaching at. Satsuki simply laughed softly in response as a particular top caught her eye. "So this date. Where are you going?"

"The winter fair." Knowing the grief she was already about to receive for this announcement alone, she felt it wise to not divulge that it was a last minute plan in order to avoid being a third wheel on Ryuko's part. Nonon, in spite of constantly prodding for Satsuki to find someone, had a tendency to scrutinize harshly.

"Really? So all those times I begged you to come with me when Uzu would drag me to the fair, all I had to do was call it a date and you would have gone?" Nonon asked in a mock irritated tone.

"My answer would still have been no because you still would have ditched me to engage in inappropriate activities on the ferris wheel," Satsuki said accusatorially.

"After HOURS of watching him try to win those stupid games," Nonon added as if it justified anything.

"Yet again you fail to see the forest for the trees. How many of those giant stuffed animals that you love so much do you have?" Satsuki pointed out.

"You have an answer for everything. Who's side are you on?" They both laughed.

"I will always be on your side Nonon. You know that," Satsuki said in a more serious tone.

"Oh, that reminds me, you still have a plus one to the wedding if you decide to bring somebody." Nonon cleared her throat loudly, obviously indicating Ryuko.

"I think it's a bit early to be flying across the country with someone I barely know, but I'll keep it in mind."

"There's a almost six months between now and then. OH, I have to go. My breakfast is here."

She smiled as Uzu shouted "Hey Satsuki!" from what she imagined was the foot of the bed. "Breakfast in bed? How cliché of you. Tell Uzu I say hello." she accused before saying her farewells.

Satsuki took a long hot shower before getting ready to meet up with Ryuko and company. Certain pressures had been relieved and her nerves had untangled significantly due to the events that had transpired over the last twenty four hours. Not only was Ryuko indeed a very good kisser, but she handled the news of Satsuki's virginity as gracefully as Ryuko could handle anything. Graceful was not a word Satsuki equated Ryuko with, but she didn't laugh or immediately dismiss Satsuki like she was afraid Ryuko might have. Even more pleasantly surprising, was that Ryuko seemed to still be interested and willing to move at a pace much more suitable to Satsuki. So the nerves she was feeling as she found a parking spot were more butterflies in her stomach rather than a razor sharp anxiety. It was a welcome change.

One would have to have been blind to miss the hulking giant that, Satsuki now knew thanks to introductions, was Ira Gamagoori. Nonon's husband to be, Uzu, was the athletic director and football coach at her old school and was not a small man, but Ira was easily three times his size. It was no longer any wonder that their football team did so well. Mako Mankanshoku was practically floating as she overflowed with excitement while making the introductions. He held his massive hand out and Satsuki hesitantly placed her own into his, expecting a bone crushing handshake. However, it was probably the gentlest and most formal handshake she had ever received. His voice was the only thing coming from him in that moment that seemed to fit, it was a deep, stern voice, conveying that the honor was his to be in the company of such beautiful women this evening. Satsuki actually colored at the formality and Mako giggled like champagne bubbles as Ryuko joined them.

"Easy there big guy. Don't go stealing *all* the women from me. Hey, Satsuki, come with me? They won't give me two passes without seein' two school IDs." Ryuko jabbed her thumb backwards towards the ticket window as she chuckled nervously. "You two go ahead in. We'll meet you by the stage."

Mako took Ira by the hand and reassured him that Ryuko knew he wasn't flirting with Satsuki as they entered. "What an interesting man," Satsuki mused watching them disappear into a building, Ira had to duck down to fit through the door.

Ryuko chuckled. "The gentlest giant you'll ever meet. I was terrified of him until Mako started dating him. I try not to think too much about umm….well…" Satsuki's eyes went wide as she produced her teachers ID from her small wallet. "Yeah," was all Ryuko said to finish that particular train of thought.

The woman behind the glass slid Satsuki's ID and a lanyard with a badge that read "School Faculty" back to her. She thanked the ticket woman, but she was too busy giving Ryuko a dirty look to respond.

"What was that about?" Satsuki asked holding up the badge for the ticket collector as they entered the same building Mako and Ira had.

"Oh," Ryuko laughed nervously, a sort of hand caught in the cookie jar kind of chuckle. "I may have told her I needed another pass for 'the other photo teacher'. I forgot it says what we teach on our IDs."

"What a rebel," Satsuki said, quite dryly. "Is there a difference?"

"Yeah," Ryuko began through genuine laughter at Satsuki's remark. "Normally we just get a discount, but with this you get in free and you get a free meal. Plus there's a few heated tents with picnic tables we can get into."

Satsuki scanned the room they were in. It was a large expo center with all sorts of companies displaying their services and products. They had about an hour before Ryuko needed to be at the school's band performance, so they took their time looking at the various displays. They both entered a guess as to how many foam car company logos were stuffed into a box in hopes of winning the car on display. Satsuki couldn't care less about the make or model, but Ryuko seemed to prefer a different model than the one on display. The county sheriff's officers had a display about driving safety. The county fire department had a display about fire safety. Satsuki laughed as Ryuko made sarcastic comments about some of the more obvious fire prevention tips.

"See, if I had one of those in my living room I can stop having bonfires," Ryuko said walking past a display of hot tubs on their way into the performance area. They met up with Mako and Ira sitting in the very back row and Ryuko said her farewells, snapping a quick photo of all of them.

Mako Mankanshoku, as Satsuki discovered, was a woman of many many many words. While perhaps as a writing teacher, Satsuki could appreciate this, she also understood that the saying "less is more" held up particularly well with words from time to time. Mako hadn't stopped telling Satsuki what she thought about everything they had seen so far, even as the school's band made their way on stage.

"OOOOOOOO!!! Did you guys enter to win the trip to Las Vegas?! Oh my goodness! Wouldn't that be so much fun?" She wrapped both her arms around Ira's massive forearm. "Just the two of us at a resort. A whole week to ourselves." The lights began to dim as the band director started to introduce the band but Satsuki's attention was drawn back to Mako. "Well, depending on when the trip would be it might be awkward for you guys. You know, it being your first date. How is it going by the way? It's Ryuko's first first date, you know?" *Wait, what did she just say?* The gears in Satsuki's head ground so forcefully to a halt it was almost painful. Before she could open her mouth to ask anything, Mako started talking again. It wasn't really a pause for an actual answer more so Mako simply stopped to take a breath.

"It's so sweet. I've never heard her talk about anyone like-" but however Ryuko spoke of Satsuki, she would have to wait to find out, for the band blasted into its first piece.

The knowledge that this was Ryuko's first date didn't concern Satsuki. If anything, it slightly evened the playing field. Satsuki could count on one hand the number of dates she had been on. The best of which was one that Nonon had set up before she figured out that Satsuki, when interested at all, was primarily interested in women. Coincidentally, the man that she had met for dinner at a moderately fancy restaurant happened to be primarily interested in men. Halfway through the appetizer he very elegantly apologized, explaining he had accepted the date to have something to tell his uncle. They ended up staying nearly until the restaurant closed, conversation flowing easily between topics as varied as their respective majors, fashion to English and many in-between. On principal, the current date she was on already topped the list, but the night was young and the band was finishing their last number. Ryuko took a few pictures of the entire band as she made her way back to them.

Mako was raving about the band and as they all exited the performance area, she let out the highest pitch squeal Satsuki had ever heard another human being make. Mako yanked Ryuko over to the display of the local humane society. Ira gave Satsuki an apologetic look and lead the way over. Satsuki groaned internally, Ryuko and Mako were in the "kitty corner" and while Ryuko was not practically rolling around with a large fluffy cat like Mako, she seemed to be enjoying herself. She stopped next to Ira who looked upset.

"Mako wants a cat more than anything but I am allergic," he said woefully, as if this was a great dishonor for him. Another attendant brought a small Pomeranian in from what Satsuki assumed was a walk to relieve itself, but it got distracted by Ira on the way to its fenced in area. It sniffed his shoe, looked up at him, and immediately sat very dutifully at Ira's feet. Satsuki had to cover her mouth to contain her soft laughter at this incredible juxtaposition.

"I'm sorry. He's very friendly," the attendant said and attempted to call the dog along but it would not move. Ira held up a hand to stop the attendant and bent down to pet the dog, a soft smile on his face.

"He recognizes the alpha of the pack. He's a good dog." After a few quick scratches behind the dog's ears, Ira stood again and let out a short sharp whistle. Every dog around them stopped what they were doing and gave Ira their full attention as he walked with the little dog at his side back to its enclosure, the attendant in awe behind him.

Ryuko made it a point to stay away from Ira when she left the enclosure but Mako made a beeline for him, locking her arm around his.

"Shall we?" Ryuko asked and Satsuki nodded. They were exiting the building to the main fairgrounds when Ira sneezed.

As soon as they made it into the open air, all four of them pulled their jackets around them a bit tighter against the cool February evening. The couples went their separate ways, Mako

wanted to see the rabbits and horses in the agriculture section but Ryuko wanted to walk down the midway before the sun fully set. They were about halfway down the midway when Satsuki noticed Ryuko hadn't yet taken a single picture.

"You're running out of time," Satsuki said. The sun had nearly set.

Ryuko laughed and snapped a picture of Satsuki. "You take the best candid shots." She turned the camera and showed Satsuki the picture, there was a very calm, pleasant expression on her face.

"So you get the good ones when you can delete them but that awful dumbstruck look is 'etched into film forever'?" She quipped and smiled at the bark of a laugh Ryuko huffed out.

"Not a single look that graces your features could ever be considered awful." Ryuko responded in a mocking tone of Satsuki's formal one and laughed again as Satsuki quirked an eyebrow in incredulity. "I'm actually waiting for a very specific time. They don't turn the lights on the rides and stuff on until *just after* the sun sets. I want the lights on, but still light enough to not need the flash. The time is actually called civil twilight."

"You learn something new everyday. Is every date with you so informative?" Satsuki asked, only no sooner had the words left her mouth did she remember what Mako had let slip.

Ryuko played with one of the dials on top of her camera and scratched the back of her head. "I guess," she mumbled sheepishly. "Is that bad?"

Satsuki felt an incredible surge of affection for Ryuko in that moment. "Not at all. In fact, this is the best date I've ever been on."

Ryuko instantly perked up. "Really? Awesome, me too." Another nervous chuckle escaped from Ryuko and Satsuki linked arms with her to continue walking down the midway.

"I'm not sure you're allowed to make that distinction halfway through your very first date ever," Satsuki said smoothly.

Ryuko's jaw unhinged and she dropped Satsuki's arm. Two and two came together just as the fair lights switched on. "I'm gonna kill Mako."

"Then again, I suppose if you've never been on a date before, then your first would win by default even if it is horrible." Ryuko was struggling to tread the deep water again, so Satsuki reeled her in before she drowned. "Although I don't see how this one could be," and she smiled softly.

Ryuko took lots of pictures of the rides and game booths with all their lights on. Satsuki's favorite so far was a shot of the ferris wheel with a long exposure, the lights on the spokes of the wheel trailing to form many concentric circles. When darkness fell, they made their way back up the midway to where they had started and Ryuko led the way down a long stretch of

food stands, the smell making Satsuki's stomach growl. She hadn't even noticed how hungry she was until presented with the smorgasbord of different foods at her disposal.

"Wait. Ryuko, where are we going?" She asked as they passed a stand serving authentic greek gyros.

"Trust me. I know the best place. You like steak tips?

Satsuki nodded but reluctantly walked away from the stand. Ryuko marched on, skipping everything in the aisle, into a new section of the fair. It was much quieter, almost as if forgotten by everyone and perhaps even time as well.

"Is this frontier land or something?" Satsuki asked seeing a woman dressed in a distinctly colonial dress outside of a building marked "General Store".

"Yesteryear Village and *this* is where the best food is." Ryuko pointed to the stand she had stopped in front of. "Steak tips with mushrooms, onions, and peppers with a side of potatoes. Not only is it the best food, but it's the best deal."

"Don't we get it for free anyway?" Satsuki asked holding up the badge she'd been wearing all night.

"Doesn't make it any less awesome!" Ryuko approached the stand and ordered, holding out the badge for the cashier to punch a hole in the corner of. Satsuki did the same, however requested no mushrooms. They sat on a bench and watched a man carving a chunk of tree trunk into a bear as they ate. They were joined shortly after they began by Mako and Ira with their own steak tip dinners.

Satsuki insisted, several times, that she did not need to see the animals in the agricultural section. Mako seemed to feel that this was an integral part of the fair experience. Satsuki promised that she would see them next year and they decided to walk back up the section of food stands they had passed over to get something for dessert. Every sweet treat a person could possibly want was available, deep fried of course. Satsuki was far from a health nut, but she found the idea of a deep fried twinkie slightly repulsing. Settling on deep fried oreos to split between the group, they made their way down the midway again. This time actually paying attention to what was around her as opposed to the pictures Ryuko was taking, Satsuki was enchanted by the lights and music around her. Many of the game operators heckled them as they passed, mostly Ira, attempting to lure him over to win a prize for Mako. He politely declined every one until they came across a high striker.

"Hey big fella! You're sure to win a prize! Show everyone your strength!" The operator called as they approached. "Three dollars for three tries. Impress your lady and win her a prize. Hit it first try and I'll give you one of the big ones. How about it?" Ira paid the operator three dollars and picked up the heavy hammer. Satsuki was slightly surprised when the bell rang out and Mako bounced happily up and down as the operator handed her a giant stuffed banana wearing a rasta hat with dreadlocks. Not because she had any doubt in Ira's strength, but that fair games were notoriously rigged.

Ryuko puffed out her chest and stepped up to the high striker, glaring at the bell nearly twenty feet in the air. She paid the operator and he took the money with a mischievous grin. Ryuko had trouble hoisting the hammer over her head but she managed to bring it down on the lever with an impressive amount of force, her feet almost leaving the ground as she made impact. Even the game operator was slightly stunned for a moment as the striker missed the bell by only a mere six inches. His expression rearranged into that same grin as he tried to coax her into three more tries but she stuffed her hands into her pockets as she rejoined them.

“You’re always welcome in the weight room, Matoi. I’ll have you ringing that bell in no time,” Ira encouraged.

“Games are all rigged anyway,” she mumbled after Ira gave her a mighty pat on the shoulder. Satsuki linked her arm around Ryuko’s again as they walked, the action seemed to cheer Ryuko up a bit.

Mako squealed again as they reached the end of the midway, nearly vibrating with excitement having reached the giant ferris wheel. She pulled Ira by the hand over to the small line to get on the ride.

“You wanna go too?” Ryuko asked, she unlinked their arms to dig some tickets out of her pocket. “Got a few just in case,” and she grinned.

“Sure,” Satsuki replied, absolutely unable to say no to the adorable grin and began walking towards the line as well but after a moment, she noticed Ryuko was no longer at her side. She turned to see what was keeping Ryuko and the flash went off.

“It was too perfect,” Ryuko said apologetically as she caught up, showing Satsuki the picture. Even Satsuki had to admit that it was a great picture, framed with her in the center of the ferris wheel lights, a small quizzical smile on her face.

“Your camera magic makes me look good,” she said modestly and Ryuko shook her head as she handed the tickets to the collector.

“It’s not magic,” is all she said as they settled into their seats. Satsuki let out a soft snort as the ride resumed its slow progress.

“What?” Ryuko asked as Satsuki snickered quietly.

“All the time you had to come up with something and you come out with ‘it’s not magic’?” Satsuki teased.

“ *You’re* the creative writing teacher. I’m just a photographer,” Ryuko replied, a hint of defensiveness in her tone, but she nudged Satsuki playfully. She rather awkwardly managed to drape an arm around Satsuki. “Sorry I didn’t win you a prize,” she said, the reason for her defensiveness becoming clear. Satsuki had forgotten yet again that this was Ryuko’s first date and that Satsuki had let Ryuko know she knew that fact must have been weighing heavily on Ryuko’s mind since her failure at the high striker.

“I was hoping you’d win something better than a rasta banana anyway,” Satsuki said as she leaned into Ryuko.

“Oh?” Ryuko laughed nervously. One of the things Satsuki liked about Ryuko’s laughs is that they were all different. This one was like the babble of a brook over stones and betrayed the uncertainty she was trying to hide. “And uhhh, how am I doing?”

The ride paused to let more people on at the bottom, but Satsuki and Ryuko were now stopped at the top. Ryuko began to reach for her camera but Satsuki stopped her. Ryuko looked up questioningly.

“Let’s just say you rang the bell a long time ago,” Satsuki said as she and Ryuko locked eyes.

Everything was spinning, literally and figuratively. The ride resumed its gentle rotation sometime before their lips actually touched but for all the spinning her head was doing, Satsuki had barely noticed. Ryuko’s hand slipped just under Satsuki’s shirt again, thankfully remaining stationary this time. Even though her hand was cold, the touch was like fire against Satsuki’s skin and she inhaled sharply through her nose.

“Sorry,” Ryuko apologized against Satsuki’s lips and began to remove her hand. Satsuki placed her own over Ryuko’s indicating that she didn’t want Ryuko to remove it. If she were a forest, she’d let Ryuko burn her down.

Neither of them realized they had returned to the bottom of the ride again or that it had stopped until the attendant cleared his throat.

“What?!” Ryuko asked, annoyed. He pointed to a large sign that read “NO PDA. NO EXCEPTIONS” in large, red, crudely painted lettering. “Oh come on! We’re just *kissing* !” She argued.

In response to this, he pointed to Ryuko’s hand in Satsuki’s shirt. “It’s a family ride. Don’t care who you are or who you’re kissing. No PDA means no PDA.” He opened the door to their seat and waited for them to exit.

When they exited the ride, Ira and Mako were waiting for them. They must have been the reason they were stopped at the top because Mako greeted them with “you too?! Ooooooooooo.” She didn’t stop teasing them about it as they walked towards the fair exit. Ryuko nudged her roughly and told her to stop once they had reached the parking lot.

“Where did you park?” Ryuko asked scanning the sea of cars.

“Over there. Under lamp post H,” Satsuki answered.

“I’ll walk you there.” She said her farewells to Ira and Mako. Mako hugged Satsuki far too tightly and Ira gently shook her hand again before leaving in the opposite direction of Satsuki’s destination. “I uhhhh, had a lot of fun...tonight.”

Satsuki couldn't help but giggle. "I apologize," she began as Ryuko looked slightly horrified that she was giggling at her. "You're just incredibly endearing in everything you do. Even when you're nervously floundering for something to say."

"Endearing. That's a good thing, right? I mean, that's not the first time you've said that so...." Ryuko trailed off, brushing her bangs with the signature red streak out of her eyes and when she dropped her hand, she caught Satsuki's, lacing their fingers together.

"Inspiring love or affection. Yes, it's a good thing." Satsuki smiled as she retrieved her keys from her pocket.

"So does this mean we're like...dating now?" Ryuko asked as they stopped next to Satsuki's car.

"We have gone on a date. I'd like to go on another one and I'm fairly certain you would as well."

"Of course!" Ryuko answered very quickly. She cleared her throat, dropping Satsuki's hand and leaned against the side of the car. "I mean, yeah. I'd like that too."

Satsuki leaned in and kissed Ryuko again. It was soft and slow, yet buzzing with something electric and supercharged, igniting that slow burning sensation again.

"Cool. I'll see you Monday," Ryuko chirped when they broke apart and turned to walk to her own car. Satsuki took her time unlocking and opening the door, watching Ryuko practically skip off.

The sheets were cool against her skin, but Satsuki was still smoldering by the time she slid between them and turned off her bedside table lamp. She stretched out completely, her hand resting on her stomach where Ryuko's had been just a few hours previously. She let that hand trail lower, fingertips dragging lightly as it traveled. Her breath caught and she closed her eyes as her hand reached its intended destination and in spite of her expansive vocabulary, she wrote the most beautiful single word poem that night.

***

End Notes

Yes there will be more. I can only resurrect so much from the depths at one time. I'm sure you've noticed that there's nothing too explicit in this part but there will be ;)

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!